

2023-2024

Teacher Student Initiative Cohort



Beneita Dennis
Person Early College
Math I & II

After earning a bachelor of arts in History and a Master's degree in Teaching from the University of Virginia, Beneita began teaching in 1994. Since then, she has taught middle school English, Social Studies, and Mathematics. Presently, Beneita Dennis is in her fourth year at Person Early College where she teaches Math 1 Honors, Math 2 Honors and Economics and Personal Finance Honors courses. A lifelong learner, she enjoys learning about other cultures and incorporating that knowledge into her classroom.

Leslie Dick
Swansboro High School
Health Sciences

Leslie Dick has been a Registered Nurse for over 25 years and has been teaching in the high school setting for 16 years. She has a BA in History, ADN in Nursing and a Master's in Nursing Education. As a Nationally Board-Certified Health Science teacher, she finds joy in teaching students about anatomy, health, and the healthcare profession. When she is not in the classroom, Leslie enjoys spending time with her husband, children and grandchildren. Leslie has been blessed with 3 awesome sons, 2 amazing daughters-in-law, and 3 grandchildren (with 2 more on the way!).



Tasha Drain
SandHoke Early College High School
World History/History Civic

Tasha Drain is in her 13th year in education. Though a native North Carolinian, the military has moved her all around. Tasha graduated from Armstrong Atlantic University in Savannah, GA, with a bachelor's in History. After graduation, she continued graduate studies while serving as the finance director for one of the Met's minor league baseball teams. Following this, she returned to the classroom in 2009 and later finished her master's degree in Curriculum & Instruction from Georgia Southern University. In 2017, Tasha and her family moved to Germany for three years. During this time, she traveled extensively and made the best of this unique opportunity. In June 2020, the military assignment ended, bringing Tasha and her family back to North Carolina. The 2023-24 school year marks the beginning of her fourth year teaching in the Fort Bragg area. Tasha is certified in economics, political science, history, and gifted education. She is currently working on her Ed.D. in administration from Liberty University

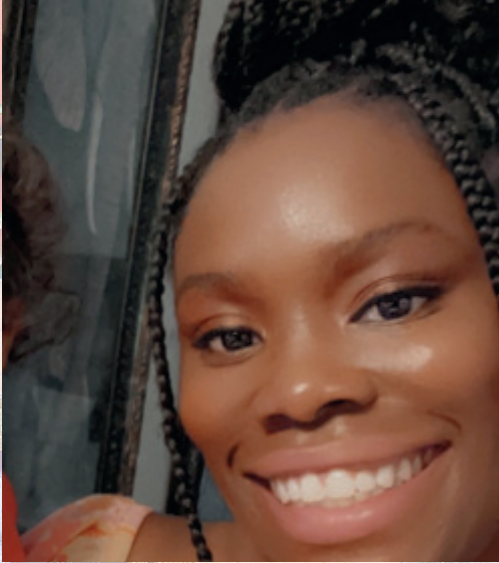


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Sarah Flowers
Northside High School
Foods I & II

Sarah Flowers holds a Bachelor's degree in Family and Community Services from East Carolina University. She is proud to be teaching at the very school she graduated from in Onslow County, where she has dedicated the past six years to education. As a cross country and track coach, Sarah is passionate about guiding students not only in the classroom but also on the field. She specializes in teaching Foods and Nutrition courses, relishing the opportunity to impart essential life skills. Currently, Sarah strives towards achieving her National Boards Certification, a testament to her commitment to excellence in education. Beyond Sarah's professional pursuits, she finds immense joy in embracing the adventure of first-time motherhood, cherishing the journey of nurturing and inspiring the next generation.



Cecilia Fountain
Northside High School
Foods I & II

Mrs. Cecilia Fountain is originally from Miami, Florida. Her family moved here as a temporary military transfer in 2005, and never left! She began her teaching career in 2003, as an elementary teacher in Miami, before moving to Camp Lejeune. Cecilia has taught every level from elementary school to community college. However, her heart is happiest at the high school level! She is a proud member of the Northside High School monarch kingdom since 2008. NHS is her second home, where she is lucky enough to be surrounded by caring co-workers who are like family.



Stefanie Grenzel
Northside High School
Physical Science, Anatomy & Physiology

Stefanie Grenzel is in her first year teaching in Onslow County, but in her 7th overall as a lateral entry teacher. At Northside High, she teaches Physical Science, Anatomy and Physiology, and Honors Earth and Environmental Science. Stefanie earned her degree in Chemical Engineering from Niederrhein University of Applied Sciences in Krefeld, Germany; she earned her degree in Accounting from Barton College in Wilson, NC; and she completed her teaching credentials at ECU. Being a transplant herself, she believes that diversity is such an important part of culture. In her spare time, she enjoys being with her dogs, running, and swimming. The beach is her favorite place



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Kathryn Hansen
Northside High School
English III & IV

Kathryn Hansen is currently an English Language Arts teacher at Northside High School in Onslow County, North Carolina. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in English from the University of Michigan, a Master's Degree in History from Adams State University, and English/Social Studies licensure from Western Carolina University. As a Marine Corps spouse, Kathryn has been able to center globalization while working as an educator in Okinawa and Germany. She also has experience as an Adjunct Professor of American History and World Civilizations. Working with a diverse group of educators and students, Kathryn facilitates culturally relevant learning experiences. She passionately models lifelong learning to her students and continues her own education.

Christy J. Hall
Alexander Early College High School
Biology Honors

Christy J. Hall is in her twentieth year as an educator in North Carolina. She graduated from Salem College in Winston-Salem with bachelor of arts degrees in both mathematics and biology. Upon graduation, she went into the workforce as a laboratory specialist with Tyson Foods, Inc. After six years, Christy realized that she belonged in education, and she returned to school through Appalachian State University. It was while at ASU that she earned her teacher certification. She is certified to teach middle school math and science, as well as high school math and science. Christy has taught in Wilkes and Alexander County Schools, Newton-Conover City Schools, and Iredell-Statesville Schools. She is currently teaching honors biology and honors chemistry at Alexander Early College High School in Taylorsville where she has been since its inception seven years ago.



Anna (Kate) Holt
White Oak High School
World History Honors/American History

Kate Holt, in her 8th year with Onslow County Schools, instructs World History and Honors American History at White Oak High School in Jacksonville, NC, holding a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. Global integration and cross-curricular activities are important in her history classroom. From 2021-2023, Ms. Holt joined the Stevens Initiative Youth for Sustainable Development Program, linking her students with peers in Marrakech, Morocco. Together, they crafted projects around the United Nations Sustainability Goals, and she visited partner schools in Marrakech in June 2023. In her third year with UNC World View's Teacher-Student Initiative, she deepens her students' global awareness of citizenship, collaboration, and community impact. Outside the classroom, she's an enthusiastic traveler and outdoor enthusiast who enjoys creating art.



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Tiffany Komorowski
Northside High School
Math III & IV

Tiffany Komorowski's teaching career began in 2010 in Louisiana, fueled by her passion for mathematics. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Mathematics from LSU at Alexandria in 2009 and later obtained a Master of Natural Science from LSU in Baton Rouge in 2011. With six children and three grandchildren, her commitment to family extends to her teaching, creating a nurturing environment. Having lived in Germany as a military dependent for two years, Mrs. Komorowski developed a profound interest in diverse cultures. This curiosity informs her teaching philosophy, where she encourages students to embrace different perspectives in STEM fields. In her free time, she enjoys reading and gardening. Mrs. Komorowski's journey is a testament to her dedication to mathematics, her family, and her quest to bridge cultures in the STEM realm.

Philia Leach
Ben L Smith High School
Math I & II

Philia Leach has been teaching Mathematics in North Carolina since 2003. She earned a bachelor's degree in Mathematics from Livingstone College, a master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction, Middle Grades Mathematics, from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and is a National Board Teacher in Mathematics. At her current school, Ben L. Smith High, Philia is an Expanded Impact Teacher (EIT) giving her the opportunity to build relationships, make connections, and grow more students. In her free time, she enjoys playing tennis and spending time with her family.



Ronny Lopez
Southeast Collegiate Prep Academy
Spanish I & II

Ronny Osorio-Lopez, a native of Colombia, holds a degree in "Licenciado en Educacion Basica Enfasis Humanidades - Ingles." He began his academic journey at Cordoba University in Colombia, South America, graduating in 2009. Ronny also earned a bachelor's degree in Tourism and Administration from the same institution. In 2016, he furthered his education, obtaining a Master's degree in TESOL from Greensboro College in the United States. Ronny has accumulated a wealth of teaching experience, encompassing 16 years, with two preceding his first bachelor's degree and 14 subsequent to it. His teaching career initiated in various Colombian schools, totaling 6 years. He later transitioned to Halifax County schools, where he has been a Spanish teacher for 9 years at Southeast Collegiate Prep Academy. His course objectives center on introducing students to the Spanish language, immersing them in the culture, and utilizing engaging classroom activities to promote a holistic understanding of the language on a



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Dr. Stephanie McGirt
SandHoke Early College High School
English III

With six years at SandHoke Early College High School, Stephanie McGirt has taught English II Honors and English III Honors, seamlessly integrating world literature and real-world issues. Her dedication to education spans back to 2003 in Hoke County Schools, with over 15 years of experience in middle-grade reading and literature. Stephanie holds a Bachelor of Arts in English and Secondary Education, and she's a U.S. Army veteran. Her academic journey led to a master's in curriculum and instruction, a license to work with academically gifted students from UNC Pembroke, and a doctorate in education obtained in 2017. Stephanie's three-year commitment to this initiative reflects her passion for real-world learning.

Korey Mitchell
White Oak High School
Visual Arts

Korey Mitchell is currently an art teacher at White Oak High School in Jacksonville, NC. Previously, she taught art for 3 years at Southwest Middle School in Jacksonville. Korey is also the yearbook advisor and coaches three sports. She has more than twenty-two years of teaching experience at all levels within the public school system. Korey earned her master's degree in art education from Mansfield University in Pennsylvania. Korey and her husband moved to North Carolina from upstate NY four years ago. They are loving life in NC.



Kelly Ottaway
Jacksonville High School
Visual Arts

Kelly Ottaway, an art enthusiast, teaches Ceramics and Beginning Visual Arts at Jacksonville High School in Jacksonville, NC. Her educational journey includes teaching at the elementary level in Southwest Elementary before returning to her alma mater. With a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Art Metal Design from East Carolina University and a minor in Art History, she is well-equipped to inspire her students. Her teaching certification was achieved through the Project Act cohort in collaboration with East Carolina University and Onslow County. A native of Onslow County, Kelly finds inspiration in her travels to new destinations, and she looks forward to sharing her newfound knowledge with her students to encourage them to explore their potential and make bold choices in the world of art.



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Jacquelyn Ruffin-Pittman

Northwest Collegiate and Technical Academy
Media Specialist

Jacquelyn Ruffin-Pittman, hailing from Murfreesboro, NC, brings a rich family heritage of community service, with her father Jacob Ruffin, Jr. a notable Town Councilman and entrepreneur. She holds degrees in Theater Arts, Speech Communications, Marketing, and Library Science. Currently, she's a Media Specialist at two high schools in Halifax County Public Schools, passionately promoting the Arts and literacy. Her involvement in The Halifax County Arts Council includes fundraising events and educational trips like "Hamilton" on Broadway. Jackie's dedicated advocacy extends to The National Society For Black Engineers Junior (NSBEjr) and expanding STEAM opportunities. She's deeply committed to fostering diverse literacy, bridging cultural understanding, and advancing STEM education through professional development and innovative programs.



Yanique Salmon

Northside High School
Math I & AP Calculus

Yanique Salmon is an international teacher from Jamaica, currently in her seventh year of teaching. She earned her B.Ed. in Secondary Education: Mathematics in 2017. After graduating college, she immediately started her teaching journey at Montego Bay High School, Jamaica, where she taught for five years. In 2022, as part of a cultural exchange teaching program, she moved to North Carolina where she is currently in her 2nd year teaching at Northside High School. She believes education is about inspiring minds and as such opening students' minds to different cultures and perspectives is a major part of her classroom culture. She is a lover of learning and believes that there is always more to learn and room for growth. She currently teaches Math 1 and AP Calculus and in her spare time, she enjoys reading, listening to music and playing/solving logic and reasoning games/puzzles.



Consuelo Schwartz

Pitt County Schools Early High School
Spanish I & II

Consuelo Schwartz has been teaching Spanish in NC public schools since 1998. Currently, she teaches Spanish at Pitt County Schools Early College High School. She has a bachelor's degree in modern languages, a master's degree in teaching Spanish and she is a National Board Certified Teacher. In 2020, she earned her NC Global Educator Digital Badge. She enjoys teaching the language and cultures of Spanish-speaking countries. She enjoys photography and traveling, having visited sixteen countries and having lived in five countries. She participated in the World View Global Study visit to China in 1998, where she visited schools. She was the recipient of the 2019 James L. Peacock Scholarship. She was part of the UNC-CH and Duke University Area Studies Teacher Advisory Council in 2019-2021.



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Katherine (Terry) Smith

Lee Early College

English I & II

Katherine (Terry)Smith's journey is a unique tale. She started in Florida, pursued her studies at DePauw University in Indiana, majoring in English Composition and minoring in Classical Studies. Her career as an educator kicked off in Los Angeles at Hobart Blvd Elementary after realizing that archaeology wasn't her true calling. From teaching younger grades, she paused for motherhood and then resumed as her youngest entered kindergarten. To accommodate her teaching career in a new state, she pursued a Master's degree and a North Carolina teaching license from NC State University. Presently, Katherine is dedicated to her role as an English I and II instructor at Lee Early College in Sanford, where she guides first-year high school students in developing advanced writing skills akin to college-level proficiency.

Lindsay Smith

North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics - Morganton

Biology Instructor

Lindsay Smith is in her 22nd year of teaching and her second year as a founding faculty member at the new NCSSM campus in Morganton. She currently teaches Environmental Science, Ecology, AP Biology, and Aquatic Ecology to 11th and 12th grade students. Lindsay is passionate about connecting her students to scientists and real-time data. She was an Albert Einstein Distinguished Educator Fellow and has participated in the Ocean Exploration Trust Science Communications Fellowship, NOAA Teacher at Sea, and the NSF PolarTREC program. Through these experiences, she traveled to Antarctica, the Bering Sea, the Galapagos Islands, and the Caribbean Sea to bring real science into her classroom and encourage her students to be scientists too. Lindsay earned her BS in Biological Sciences from Michigan State University and her MS in Environmental Science from the University of Michigan.



Tonya Smith

North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics

Spanish Language Instructor

Tonya Smith has been a member of the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics (NCSSM) Humanities Department since 2008. She teaches Spanish and African Studies (Precolonial Africa and Modern Africa). She's also taught NCSSM's Modern North Africa and the Middle East course. Tonya loves leading student educational trips. Over the years, she's led multiple trips to various locations in Latin America, Europe, Morocco, and even New Orleans. Tonya received her MA in Spanish Language and Literatures from NCSU. She loves working with, learning from, and sharing her curiosity with her students!



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Meredith Southworth

Pitt County Schools Early College High School

English I & IV

Meredith Southworth graduated from East Carolina University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English Education in 2006 and from Appalachian State University with a Master of Arts degree in Online Learning and Professional Development in 2018. She currently teaches English at Pitt County Schools Early College High School in Winterville, NC. Through her work in the Global Issues Club, Scholars of Global Distinction, international cultural exchange opportunities, and international travel, she has made it a priority to expose students to the diverse world outside their homes and to help them explore the magic of language and culture. When she is not teaching, you can find her traveling, climbing mountains, scuba diving, camping, or playing outside with her husband and three kids.

Jodie Washington

Southeast Collegiate Prep Academy

EC Teacher

Jodie Washington is originally from Goldsboro, NC and returned after over 30 years of living in Japan, Mississippi, Kansas, Texas, Georgia, and South Carolina. She is a 2018 Teach for America alumni and is in her 6th year as an EC teacher in Halifax County Schools. She earned her BA and MS in Criminal Justice from Saint Leo University. Jodie believes her experiences as a veteran in the USAF and being a mother of six children are her most valuable attributes to being an educator.



Heather Watson

North Duplin Jr/Sr High School

Agriculture Teacher

Heather Watson, the Agriculture Teacher and FFA Advisor at North Duplin Jr/Sr High School since Spring 2022, brings a diverse career background to her role. Her journey began in swine production facilities, followed by obtaining an Associate Degree in Livestock and Poultry Technology from Sampson Community College in 2005. Heather's educational pursuits led her to UNC-Pembroke, where she earned her Bachelor's Degree in Interdisciplinary Studies in Fall 2021. During this time, she took on the role of Agriculture Teacher for Duplin County Schools, commencing in the Spring of 2022. Heather's educational journey continued at NC A&T in Fall 2022, where she embarked on her Master's in Agricultural Education and Professional Licensure. Her graduation is expected in December 2023. Beyond the classroom, Heather is an outdoor enthusiast, embracing nature and continuous learning. Her dedication to agriculture shines through as she shares her passion with her students, inspiring them to become Ag-Vocates.

